



2009-07 -Living Islamic History -Related Pages (1096)

All Items on <https://archive.org/details/realpatidar>



realpatidar.com

Full Library on <https://realpatidar.com/library>



LIVING ISLAMIC HISTORY

Studies in Honour of
Professor Carole Hillenbrand

Edited by Yasir Suleiman

realpatidar.com



Real Patidar Library

<https://www.realpatidar.com/library>

This book/literature/article/material may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The library does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The library shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.realpatidar.com>

About Real Patidar books

Real Patidar's mission is to organize the information on Satpanth religion, which is a Nizari Ismaili sect of Shia branch of Islam, and to make it universally accessible and useful. Real Patidar Books helps readers discover the material on Satpanth online while helping authors and researchers in their studies. You can know more by visiting <http://www.realpatidar.com>

You can resize and move this box in any PDF Application like Adobe Acrobat Reader.

Use the Bookmarks facility in the PDF to directly go to the pages containing Highlights.

For Reference See Pages: 2, 3, 4.

For page numbers, see the page footer. Page numbers are in 'Page x of y' format

References by: RealPatidar.com - Created using: Create-D-File-Step2.pyw (v51)



2009-07 -Living Islamic History -Related Pages (1096)

realpatidar.com



LIVING ISLAMIC HISTORY

Studies in Honour of
Professor Carole Hillenbrand

Edited by Yasir Suleiman

realpatidar.com



realpatidar.com

FARHAD DAFTARY

The early history of Nizari Ismailism in South Asia remains obscure. According to the traditional accounts of the Indian Nizaris, as preserved in their devotional literature known as *ginans*, the *da'wa* in India was initiated by emissaries or *pirs* dispatched by the Nizari imams from Persia, probably in the seventh/thirteenth century. The earliest Nizari *pirs* operating in India concentrated their activities in Sind, where Ismailism had persisted clandestinely in Multan and elsewhere since the Fatimid times. It was mainly Pir Sadr al-Din who organised and consolidated the Nizari *da'wa* in South Asia. Pir Sadr al-Din, who flourished in the second half of the ninth/fifteenth century, converted large numbers of Hindus from the Lohana trading caste and gave them the title of Khoja, derived from the Persian word *khwaja*, an honorary title meaning lord or master.

The specific tradition of Nizari Ismailism that evolved in South Asia became known as Satpanth (*sat panth*) or the 'true path' (to salvation), a term used by the Khojas throughout their *ginans*. In India, as in Persia, the Nizari Khojas developed a close relationship with Sufism; Multan and Uch, in Sind, in addition to serving as centres of Satpanth Ismailism, were the headquarters of the Suhrawardi and Qadiri Sufi orders. The same doctrinal affinities that existed between Persian Nizari Ismailism and Sufism also existed between Satpanth Ismailism and Sufism. As a result, Nizari Khojas were able to present themselves for extended periods as one of the mystically oriented communities of Sind, where such communities existed in both the predominantly Sunni Muslim and Hindu milieux. However, in contrast to the situation in Persia, the *pirs* and their Khoja followers may not have consciously and deliberately developed their Sufi connections for *taqiyya* purposes. The Khojas, unlike the Nizaris in Persia, were safeguarded to some extent against Sunni persecution by the Hindu elements which were an integral part of their Satpanth tradition. They also dissimulated intermittently as Sunnis. All this enabled the Khojas to blend more readily into the religious, cultural and social structure of Sind, attracting less attention as Ismaili Shi'is and escaping persecution by the region's Sunni rulers.

The origins of the particular form of Ismailism known in South Asia as Satpanth, and its religious literature, the *ginans*, remain very obscure. In particular, it is not known whether Satpanth resulted from the conversion policies of the *pirs*, or whether it represented an indigenous tradition that had evolved gradually over time, with the Nizari *pirs* or preacher-saints adapting their preaching to an existing religious situation. The weight of evidence seems to support the latter alternative. On the other hand, many modern scholars of Satpanth have generally attributed the mixed, Hindu-Muslim, interfacing or syncretism of this Ismaili tradition to the preaching strategy of the



RELIGIOUS IDENTITY, DISSIMULATION AND ASSIMILATION

pirs, who are held to have designed suitable Hindu-oriented policies for maximising the appeal of their message in a Hindu ambience of mainly rural and uneducated castes. This also explains why the *pirs* turned to Indian vernaculars, rather than the Arabic or Persian used by the educated classes, in order to further enhance the popularity of their preaching. For the same reasons, the *pirs* used Hindu idioms and mythology, interfacing their Islamic and Ismaili tenets with myths, images and symbols already familiar to Hindus. In other words, the *pirs* adopted a strategy of acculturation that proved very successful and won large numbers of converts to Satpanth (Nanji 1978: 65–96; Asani 2001: 155–68).

However it was achieved, Satpanth Ismailism does represent an indigenous tradition reflecting specific historical, social, cultural and political circumstances prevalent in medieval India. And the Hindu cover of the Khojas, as expressed by Hindu elements in the Satpanth tradition, in addition to encouraging conversion, also served *taqiyya* purposes and made the Khojas less conspicuous in their predominantly Hindu and Sunni environments. In a sense, Satpanth Ismailism represented a complex form of dissimulation and acculturation adapted to the religious, social, cultural and political realities of South Asia. In this Indo-Muslim context, *taqiyya* meant something much more than the prudential concealment of one's true religious identity, or dissimulation through superficial adoption of an exterior guise. It involved the creative application of *taqiyya* through a highly complex and organic process of indigenisation, adhesion, acculturation and syncretism (Kassam 1995: 62–74). This is why the Satpanth tradition of the South Asian Khojas differs so significantly from the other Nizari traditions elaborated in Central Asia, Persia and Syria.

It is also to be noted that Satpanth Ismailism did not always evolve coherently and smoothly in India. Recent research has shown that certain communities which originally adhered to Satpanth did revert to Hinduism. This phenomenon seems to have occurred in the case of the Kamad or Kamadiyya of Rajasthan, for instance, the untouchable worshippers of a deified saint known as Ramdev Pir (Khan 1997: 29–168). Removed from the religious centres of Satpanth in Sind, and perhaps originally converted superficially, the Kamad experienced a complex process of 're-Hinduisation', redefining and shifting their identity. In the event, they completely forgot their Satpanth heritage, while their devotional poems are permeated with Ismaili references. As a different case of shifting identities, we may reiterate that many isolated Persian groups dissimulating as Twelver Shi'is eventually became fully assimilated into the predominantly Twelver religious community of Safawid and post-Safawid Persia. For those groups, as well as for the Muhammad-Shahi Nizaris of India, dissimulation under



realpatidar.com

FARHAD DAFTARY

the Twelver exterior guise eventually led to the internalisation of that guise and a complete loss of their Ismaili identity.

Meanwhile, the Nizari imams themselves had continued to dissimulate variously in post-Safawid Persia as Twelver Shi'is. It was under such circumstances that the forty-sixth Nizari imam, Hasan 'Ali Shah (1804–81), who had received the honorific title of the Agha Khan (Aga Khan), meaning lord and master, from the Qajar monarch of Persia, settled permanently in Bombay in 1848, after earlier military conflicts with the Qajar establishment. The Nizari Ismaili imamate had now been transferred, after some seven centuries, from Persia to India. The Nizari imam, who had mainly dissimulated as a Twelver Shi'i in Persia, asserted his authority over the Khoja community with some difficulty. Satpanth Ismailism, as noted, was influenced by Hindu elements, whilst the Khojas had also dissimulated variously as Sunnis or Twelver Shi'is. In the settlement of their legal affairs too, the Khojas, like some other Muslim groups in India, had often resorted to Hindu customs rather than the provisions of Islamic law. These factors had not been particularly conducive to the articulation of a strong and distinct sense of Ismaili religious identity. In fact, dissident Khoja groups appeared periodically during the nineteenth century, claiming Sunni or Twelver Shi'i heritage and identity for their community. They even brought such claims before the Bombay High Court for adjudication. It was under such circumstances that the Agha Khan launched a widespread campaign for defining and delineating the specific religious identity of his Khoja followers. And in 1866, the Bombay High Court legally recognised the status of the Nizari Khojas as a community of 'Shia Imami Ismailis' (Fyzee 1965: 504–49; Shodan 1999: 82–116). Nevertheless, groups of dissenting Khojas seceded periodically and joined mainly the Ithna'ashari Khojas of India and East Africa.

Building on the court decisions in Bombay and the work of his grandfather, the forty-eighth Nizari imam, Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III (1877–957), also devoted much energy to delineating the Nizari Khojas from those Khojas who had preferred to be Sunnis or Ithna'asharis, also separating his followers in Persia from the Twelvers there. By the early decades of the twentieth century, as a result of their *taqiyya* heritage, the Persian Nizaris normally observed their religious rituals mainly in the fashion of, and in company with, the Twelver Shi'is, with detrimental consequences in terms of their identity. It was in 1908 that a suit was filed against Aga Khan III in the Bombay High Court by certain members of his own family led by a cousin, Hajji Bibi. The litigants argued that all along they had been of the Twelver Shi'i persuasion, once again attesting to the damaging long-term consequences of the Nizaris' *taqiyya* practices. In the aftermath of the Hajji Bibi Case the Nizari imam asked his Persian followers to